

# On the Screen

A SERIAL STORY

BY OLIVER SANDYS

It was just an ordinary domestic broil, too trivial to detail on paper, as such broils usually are.

The pity of it was that the Greenings, who were devoted to each other, should quarrel at all.

Jameson Greening was horribly hot-tempered. This was the first time he had shown it to his wife. She was not in the wrong, as it happened, and his hard words hurt her. Jameson was jealous of her chance encounter with an old friend. And a jealous man can be unjust.

But Daphne Greening was an Australian. Australian girls are brought up on an equality with men, but they exact and get the deference due to their sex. She kept herself in hand, knowing that if she let herself go her temper would burn quite as fiercely as her husband's.

"That'll do, Jimmy," she said quietly. "I met him by accident, and I asked him to lunch, as I would any girl chum. And I won't apologize, because there wasn't the slightest bit of harm in it."

"I refuse to let you entertain Australian backwoodsmen in my house," fumed Greening.

"I'm an Australian myself," she reminded him. "And I knew Mr. Fanshaw long before I met you. He used to take me on his knee when I was a little girl."

"And I dare say he wouldn't object to do the same thing now," retorted Greening rather vulgarly.

Daphne flushed angrily. "I've never been talked to like this before, Jimmy. It's insulting. I'm not taking any more."

She left the room, and presently Greening flung out of the house.

He already felt ashamed of himself, but he had not reached the point of going straight to his wife and apologizing. No doubt she would do that herself and so save him an ignominious humbling. They would be sure to have regained their normal relations by dinner-time.

He turned in at his club in St. James Street. Lunch there, a quiet read, forty winks, and a game or two of billiards would put him right with the world again.

After all, Daphne was the jolliest, best-tempered little wife-comrade in the world, and he had been a beast to haul her over the coals for what, after all, was only an ordinary act of hospitality to a fellow countryman.

That excellent club luncheon lost some of its savor. There was something wrong with the mayonnaise, the grill was not just as he liked it, Stilton was out of season and the Port Salut was not fresh enough. A smoke and the papers were not as consoling as Greening had expected.

Between the printed lines he kept reading all the unkind things he had said to his wife; in place of the illustrations—photographic studies of artfully-posed actresses clothed chiefly in a yard or two of muslin and a smile—Daphne's face stared at him with accusing, reproachful eyes. He was clean out of form at billiards.

He decided to go home. The uneasy pain he felt, mental rather than physical, was worse than an attack of indigestion. It showed him how tremendously fond he was of Daphne, tho. Why had they quarreled at all? What on earth had made him begin it? Yes, he would go home, tell her how sorry he was, get it off his chest.

It had taken him hours to reach the apologetic state. The interval had been pregnant of much affecting two lives. But he did not know it. He could not guess that things of vital import to Daphne and himself would be ordered—as matters where human life is concerned—are frequently ordered—in much less time than hours.

Daphne Greening took the big step in hers in something under an hour. The outward manifestation of it was the

packing of a portmanteau and the writing of a short letter which she left on the desk in her husband's library.

Dear Jimmy,—There is no necessity for me to explain why I am leaving you. The reason should be quite clear. I am too proud to stay. We have had six awfully happy months together, and I will try to keep the memory of them with me wherever I go.

Daphne.

Too proud also was she to take all her personal belongings. They consisted mainly of Greening's presents to her. All she had in the way of money was five pounds. The banking account which her husband had opened for her did not count. She did not intend to draw upon that. Five pounds, she was quite sure, would keep her going until she got an engagement on the stage.

She knew of no other way of earning a living. The stage seemed to offer an easy avenue to immediate employment. Most of her own friends and all of her people were in Australia. She had only herself to rely on now. She was very young, altogether inexperienced, and not in the least bit frightened at the big step she had taken. She would take another name, make her

"What! In the middle of the show?" he sneered.

"You can at least deliver my card."

An insolent stare was all she got.

"Do you refuse to take it?"

The man shrugged. "Oh, if you like." He took it. "Out of a shop?"

Daphne, ignorant of the technicality, mistook his meaning and flushed indignantly.

"No, I'm not," she answered. Then she changed her tactics. "Please try and get Sir Wilfrid to see me," she said in a softer voice.

The doorkeeper changed his, too. He came nearer, an evil expression on his heavy face.

"Just one kiss then—"

Daphne gave him a look of disgust before she turned and passed out thru the swing door. Sir Wilfrid was completely inaccessible.

So was Cecil Ford, Mayne Fuller, Sir George Arundel. She was told that she could not see any of these luminaries except by appointment.

She felt horribly downhearted and disappointed. It was too late to attempt to see other managers that evening. The houses of entertainment were disgorging their audiences already.

She was passing the Pall Mall Theater on her way home when it occurred



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way alone, and perhaps in a year or two, when by hard work she had made a position for herself—perhaps become famous—her husband would see her, recognize her—bring her home again.

She was not proof against that dream of the beginner. If hope did not spring eternally in the breast of every would-be Thespian the stage would not be such an overcrowded profession as it is.

The first thing to do was to find lodgings. Bloomsbury being central, she took a room in one of its boarding-houses, and gave her name as Miss Barry. She even had some cheap cards printed in that name. Then she unpacked, ate a badly cooked supper, and hastened off to theaterland.

She had no idea that it is quite as difficult to obtain audience of an important actor-manager as to interview royalty. The king himself might prove more accessible, for kings are human, whereas the potentates of the theaters are often lacking in the attribute of humanity.

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"Can I see Sir Wilfrid Nuttall?" she asked. "Here is my card."

The man did not even glance at it.

to her to try her luck there. The management was in the hands of an actress, a woman, who, rumor had it, has ever set the conventions at defiance. Daphne did not know that.

She was inquiring for Miss Becky Mayer fully expecting another rebuff, when a lady making her way out stopped to listen to what she was saying. She was over-dressed, over-jeweled, over-scented. Yet there was something arresting, even compelling about her.

"What is it?" she asked. "Can I do anything for you?"

She turned to a man who waiting for her in the vestibule. In the street an elaborately upholstered car was throbbing, its engine running free.

"Shan't be long, Ted," she said over her shoulder. "Come along, little girl."

She led Daphne along a corridor into her dressing-room, a palatial room hung with silk, furnished with Louis XVI. gilt chairs, and a dressing-table copied from an original that had once stood in Versailles.

"Well?" she said, looking Daphne over critically.

"I want to go on the stage," Daphne made answer, under the impression that she was speaking to one of the actresses playing in the piece. "I'm quite inex-

perienced, and I thought that Miss Mayer might be able to help me to make a start."

The bejeweled lady laughed lightly and thoughtfully fingered the gold toilet articles on the dressing-table.

"Miss Mayer would tell you there is only one way to succeed on the stage," she said. She made a gesture indicating the room and its contents. "This way."

"Of course you know Miss Mayer well?" said Daphne innocently.

"Very well."

"And, like her, you've succeeded?"

The suggestion brought a mirthless laugh to the actress's lips, but she did not answer the question directly.

"So you want a leg-up," she mused. "What's brought you to stageland? Haven't you a home?"

"I—had."

"Married?"

"I've left my husband. We quarreled. I—I came right away."

In the fewest possible words she related what had happened. The actress listened, not unsympathetically.

"Heavens! And you call that a quarrel!" she smiled. "I should call it a good excuse for some extra kisses. You must go back, of course."

"I couldn't, however much I wanted to. My pride—"

The woman turned from her a little impatiently.

"Oh, pride!" she exclaimed, and snapped her fingers scornfully. "Look here, I could help you if I liked. No, don't thank me. I'm not going to. I've never refused a hand to any of my own sort who are up against it. But you're different. You've got some illusions left. Keep them and keep off the stage. Don't you understand?"

"No," said Daphne simply.

"Then I'll tell you. I'm a Jewess. That means I was brought up with particularly stern views concerning morality. Morality is a religion with my race. I went on the stage. For five years I was more often starving than not. I had no decent clothes. I was passed over continually, and girls without an ounce of talent got the parts I ought to have been playing, simply because they looked more prosperous."

"And then you got your chance?"

"Then—I took my chance. And this is what it spelled: my father cursed me and flung the money I offered him at my feet. My mother's heart was broken. My brothers and sisters don't know me. I'm an outcast, a pariah, as far as they are concerned. Do you think all these things—gold and silver fripperies—compensate me for all I've lost? It wasn't long before I hated them as I hated the life—stage-life. Now, I'm used to it. I had to get used to it. I'm all in. You see what the odds are against you? You may start with the best of intentions. I did. I'm not running down the stage. There are lots of good women on it—women who would share their last penny with any one in real need. Talking of need, can I help you with money?"

Daphne shook her head sorrowfully. The actress laid a hand on her arm.

"You'll thank me one day for the advice I've been giving you. It sounds like a Jeremiad, doesn't it? It's not that, tho. I ought to know. Good night. Come to me if I can be of use to you in any other way. Don't do anything rash. I'll always see you."

She nodded and led the way out. Daphne, at the stage door, watched her get into her car. The man who had been waiting took his seat beside her.

On the point of leaving the theater it occurred to Daphne that she had not seen Miss Mayer after all; nor did she know the name of the actress to whom she had just been talking.

"Has Miss Mayer left?" she inquired.

The doorkeeper stared at her. "Yes," he said stolidly.

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